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**Sent:** Wed 8/19/2015 4:15:03 PM  
**Subject:** Tainted mine water from Colo. reaches Lake Powell

Casa Grande Dispatch

Posted: Tuesday, August 18, 2015 8:36 am

Tainted mine water from Colo. reaches Lake Powell

**Staff and Wire Reports**

PAGE — A massive spill from an abandoned Colorado gold mine has reached the waters of Lake Powell on the Utah-Arizona border.

The inspector general for the Environmental Protection Agency is investigating the cause of the spill that unleashed 3 million gallons of contaminated wastewater into rivers that supply water to Arizona and two other states.

The inspector general's office said the investigation also will focus on the EPA's response to the Aug. 5 spill from the defunct Gold King Mine near Silverton, Colo.

U.S. Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Ariz., visited Page on Friday to assure residents that her office is working closely with the EPA and Arizona Department of Environmental Quality in an effort to stay abreast of any problems that might result from the Gold King Mine spill last week.

"My main message is to let people know that Page is open for business," Kirkpatrick said.

Kirkpatrick says her office receives an update from the EPA daily. The EPA has set up 12 water monitoring stations along the San Juan River and Animas Rivers and are reporting that the rivers have returned to pre-spill turbidity levels.

Kirkpatrick said in a statement the EPA has begun taking water samples from Lake Powell. After gathering the water samples they'll be sent to a lab for analysis.

Kirkpatrick said her immediate concern is the health of Arizona's communities and environments that could be impacted if the Colorado River is tainted.

EPA and contract workers accidentally unleashed 3 million gallons of contaminated wastewater as they inspected the idled mine. The spill released heavy metals such as arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury into a tributary of the Animas River, turning the river sickly yellow and raising concerns about long-term environmental damage.

The spill affected rivers that supply water for drinking, recreation and irrigation in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah as well as the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Nation says it's waiting for test results from its own environment officials before deciding whether to declare the San Juan River safe for use.

Lake Powell is a huge reservoir 300 miles downstream that feeds the Colorado River and supplies water to the Southwest.

The inspector general's office said the investigation comes in response to a congressional request.

Lawmakers from both parties have criticized the EPA's response as slow and overly cautious. Leaders of oversight committees in both the House and Senate say they are planning hearings after Congress returns from its August recess.

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy has said her agency takes full responsibility for the accident and expressed deep sorrow for the environmental harm caused to the Animas and San Juan rivers.

Tribal President Russell Begaye has advised Navajos not to let livestock drink from the river or use the water for crops.

Meanwhile, New Mexico has lifted water restrictions for the Animas and San Juan rivers, and Colorado has reopened the Animas to boating. Utah also has given the OK for San Juan River to be used for crops and livestock.

Begaye spokesman Mihio Manus says the tribe's Environmental Protection Agency is analyzing water samples.

McCarthy traveled to Colorado and New Mexico last week following bipartisan pressure from congressional delegations in the two states. Lawmakers from Utah, Arizona and other Western states also have blasted the EPA for a response many call insufficient.

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